

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

1652

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

MORI/CDF C03223178

INFORMATIONSECRET/SENSITIVE

March 27, 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: GENERAL SCOWCROFT *✓*

FROM: JOHN H. HOLDRIDGE *W.H.H.*

SUBJECT: Comments on CIA Memorandum on Cambodia

Mr. Schlesinger, CIA Director, sent you a memorandum on March 23 recommending that General Haig visit Cambodia to determine if there is any alternative to continued support for President Lon Nol, and to explore the possibilities of an early Laotian-type settlement. Schlesinger also suggested that Lon Nol be advised to release members of the royal family, including Sirik Matak, from house detention, to declare martial law and assign brother Lon Non to Washington as Ambassador. We have questions about some of Schlesinger's suggestion and offer the following thoughts:

-- General Haig would make good emissary to Lon Nol, but he should be sent to Phnom Penh only with a concrete demarche to the President and only after we have determined what we want to do. We can make this assessment in Washington, and have already commissioned a comprehensive study from the CIA on various future scenarios and options.

-- Release of detained members of the royal family would not accomplish much; our intervention on Matak's behalf after his outrageous statements on March 22 would be a bold affront to Lon Nol and could encourage Matak's supporters seriously to consider a coup d'etat, under the assumption of our acquiescence.

-- We do not understand CIA's suggestion about Sosthene Fernandez assuming martial law powers. Does this mean that General Sosthene will be the national administrator of the martial law or that he will have a special mandate only for the armed forces? In any position, Fernandez probably would be circumscribed by Lon Non if the latter remains in Cambodia.

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-- Lon Nol's exile to Washington would now probably be impossible even if Lon Nol agreed. However, we should study this option further.

-- We should not be tempted to precipitous action -- such as the CIA memo suggests -- or overreact to internal political developments. The parallels to Vietnam in 1963 are too close. Rather, we should keep our eyes fixed on our only important consideration in Cambodia -- whether and for how long a friendly government can sustain itself under the changed political circumstances following the March 17 bombing of the Presidential Palace. Only if we conclude that the regime is indeed foundering and the armed forces are unable to keep open lifeline LOCs should we take drastic action (e.g., a presidential demarche or special emissary).

-- The essential question in Cambodia is not so much "national unity" or "broadening the base" but efficient administration of the government and army. To achieve this we agree that Lon Nol's role must be eliminated and more talented individuals be brought into the government. However, Lon Nol does not have to depart as he is a very useful element of legitimacy and continuity.

-- Our task therefore is to locate another respected and dynamic individual who can take over the government, attract better people and push through essential reforms to keep the military budget under control (i.e. eliminate "phantom" soldiers).

-- Considering Sirik Matak's inflammatory remarks to the New York Times on March 22, we conclude that he is now "dead" with Lon Nol. However, we should ask whether this is the end of the line or whether another individual can be located and promoted to accomplish the above objectives.

-- If we conclude -- after dispassionate review -- that Cambodia's current drift is unacceptable, we should therefore focus our energies on getting rid of Lon Nol and finding a substitute for Sirik Matak in our game plan.

-- In any event, we do not favor pushing the Cambodians into a Laotian-type settlement. Such an agreement would give the enemy its essential objectives (a veto over U.S. assistance to the Khmer and a free hand on resupply through Kampong Som port to their forces in Vietnam). A de facto partition of the country -- a standstill cease-fire -- would be far preferable, leaving an independent regime in Phnom Penh and the Communists with only half a loaf on their logistics requirements.

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

FROM THE DESK OF
THE DIRECTOR

[Handwritten signature]

March 23, 1973

TO: BRENT SCOWCROFT

Attached are some thoughts on what
we might do to shore up the situation
in Cambodia.

[Handwritten signature]
James R. Schlesinger
Director

Attachment

Comments?

✓ Cy-Mr. Kennedy

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Executive Registry

73-1535

23 March 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence
VIA: Deputy Director for Operations
SUBJECT: Possible Steps on Cambodia

Attached are a few thoughts relative to our discussions this morning. I have done them up in the form of a blind memorandum in case you wish to forward them.

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Chief, Far East Division

Attachment
As stated above

cc: DDCI

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23 March 1973

SUBJECT: Cambodia

1. The situation in Cambodia has deteriorated rapidly enough in the past week to suggest the need for an immediate reassessment of prior plans to strengthen the Government. It now seems virtually impossible to maneuver a situation in which Lon Nol could be induced to depart Cambodia with Lon Non, leaving behind a caretaker government under Sirik Matak. A new look at policy can perhaps best be accomplished by sending a Presidential emissary to Phnom Penh to consult with all the Cambodian players and with the U. S. representation there. General Haig would be a logical choice for this mission.

2. Our approach at this stage might best be one in which we express very considerable concern to Lon Nol about the political situation and its effect upon the capability of the GKR to: a) defend itself against the NVA and the Khmer Insurgents and; b) develop sufficient strength to carry out negotiations leading to some reasonable settlement. The visit should be billed as a fact-finding one to all parties, but the real purpose should be to assess whether there is any real alternative to continued support of Lon Nol. Consideration might be given, however, to suggesting the following steps to Lon Nol:

--- Immediate release from arrest of the members of the royal family including Sirik Matak as a gesture of confidence on the part of the Government.

--- Declaration of martial law with Major General Sosthene Fernandez given necessary powers to fight corruption and rejuvenate the Cambodian Army.

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--- Assignment of Lon Non as Ambassador to Washington.

3. The Presidential emissary could also explore with all parties the possibility and desirability of attempting to arrange a negotiating channel with the Khmer Insurgents, either directly or through Hanoi. Negotiations now might be leading from a position of weakness but if the Government's effectiveness continues to deteriorate, it might be better to attempt some kind of a Laotian solution earlier rather than later.

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